

A Walk through the Garden Gate

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A garden is a space between. We may think of a house or the city as a place for people, a human place where we create order and protection for human needs. The garden is a meeting place between this world of man and the world of nature, a nature not in the control of man. The garden is about magic, connection, and, as we are part of Nature, our own shadows and wellsprings within that we only barely comprehend.

The garden is a place of safety in a world of mystery, where the world of the mind and spirit may be explored. It is a playground for the soul. Art, too, is about this playground. It holds chaos and order within one thing. The garden may be formal or informal but there is always a part that we must give to the whims of Nature. It is a place where we can make friends with this mystery: the change and the randomness of Nature; a place to learn to celebrate our own mystery and that of a universe of 40 billion galaxies.



A GATE is like a preface to a novel, or a prelude to a piece of music. It is the introduction to the story of the garden and hints at what is to come. The gate can talk about protection, or mystery. It can invite or tease. It can tell history, or tell us that when we pass through we enter a different world, perhaps one where we take our hats off.

The WALLS talk about containment or about borders and how they can join as well as separate. They can grow in our mind's eye beneath the earth, suggesting a lost civilization or reach to the sky. They can be strong supporting sculptures or they can seem to crumble with time.

The PATH. Is it planned for a police car or firetruck? Or is it made so that we must pick our way slowly along it, careful to negotiate each stone, in order to notice things with much more detail? Does it advance to a focal point or lead us into an adventure full of suspense? The path, like our own in life, is a journey in time.

The PLACE. Where is the North Star? Where does the sun come up? Where is the sea? What is the geology of the place? What is the history? What about the history of a family or of our

own dreams? Is it a place for children, a place for conversation or meditation? If the garden is to have a heart, it must begin from where it is.

The FOUNTAIN or POOL. Water is where life comes from, where spirits dwell. The fountain's waters may seem to come from within the earth or to leap up into the light and the sun, to become a powerful symbol of joining opposites, both male and female. Does the fountain contain life?.....Fishes, frogs, water lilies? Is it clean and pristine or dark and unfathomable? Does it bring the blue of the sky to the earth? Can we sit by it and dip our hand into it or see it with longing from a distance?

There are so many elements, which contribute to the story of the garden: myth; self-concept; our place in the natural world.

What about ART OBJECTS? Traditionally, art has been an integral part of the garden. Art is our way of making the unknown physical. It has been a way to bring into the being what was sacred to us, our gods and goddesses, our inner fears and hopes. The art object is a step toward understanding. It could be a small niche with an ancient goddess watching us pass. Or a four-foot tall frog covered with moss forcing us to walk around him. Or a quiet spiral etched into the stone walk. Wherever we find these human marks, they are entries into art. They can "talk" to the rest of the garden and offer us a door to our own inner worlds.

Then, there are COLUMNS -- symbols of the central axes of the earth reaching somewhere -- repeating the trees, sometimes supporting, perhaps in line with a wall, starting a rhythm, contrasting with the horizontal earth.

BENCHES are stations of rest, which reflect the horizontal line of the earth -- places to converse, to stop, outlining a site, directing the eye.

ARBORS are the reception of both horizontal and vertical. Like the gazebo, they both offer protection from and exposure to the uncertainties of nature.

All of these elements can have a profound effect on the buildings nearby. Walls, arbors, benches, art and landscape are in fact the best way to anchor a building to the land. They act as the roots or saplings of a giant tree, expanding the life of the building into the landscape, extending the building's life and mystery to the world of nature.

The garden expresses life and death. The seasons allow us to celebrate the new buds, the flowers. In fall, the garden abandons color yet with its texture and scent reminds us that Nature never abandons anything. It only moves from one form of life to another....one included in this transformation.

We must not forget shadows, the deep places where things are seen and not seen. Stravinski said, "Music is the place between the notes," where we can imagine and the shadows are what we cannot see. Light and shade have equal value.

The garden is a safe place to start to explore the world within, a place between chaos and order. It can be a place of wonder, of journey, of healing.